

## Congressman Baird's Statement in Support of Iraq Resolution; Calls for a Change in Strategy (February 15, 2007)

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congressman Brian Baird spoke on the House floor in favor of the Iraq resolution (H.Con.Res 63) that expresses support for the troops, but opposes the President's proposal to escalate the war in Iraq. In addition, he called for a change in current strategy. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery, and submitted into the official record:

Every member of this Congress, every member, regardless of political party, and regardless of their position on this war, or the resolution before us now, is equally committed to the security of this nation, our communities, and our families. And I believe every member of this Congress supports our troops and their families while they are deployed. We must all support our veterans and their families when they return home.

Since this war began, I have attended, as many of my colleagues have, deployment ceremonies as we send the troops off to fight. I have been on the tarmac in the cold and dark mornings when they've come home to their families. I have been many times to Walter Reed to visit the wounded. I have been to funerals for the fallen and held the hands of loved ones left behind.

Over the past weeks, months, and in the years since this conflict began, I have heard from constituents on all sides of this issue, including members of our armed forces who have served or are now serving in Iraq. Some of our troops support the war in Iraq, others oppose it, some support an increase, others don't. To suggest that opposing the President's planned escalation means not supporting the troops would imply that many of the troops themselves and many of their loved ones back home don't support the troops. That suggestion simply makes no sense and we should put it to rest for good.

The real question today is not whether or not we are committed to security, or whether or not we support the troops. The real question is how we believe protecting security is best achieved. On that, there is legitimate disagreement, which is, or should be, what this debate is about. To have that debate is not only a right, but a responsibility of the elected representatives in a republic such as ours. Indeed, it is to defend that very right that our troops are being asked to serve and sacrifice not just in Iraq, but around the world.

I saw the Pentagon explode from my office window on September 11th. We all knew that thousands of our fellow citizens were dying before our eyes and I was worried about the safety of my own family. None of us need to be reminded through floor speeches or Presidential homilies about the threat of terrorism. But let us also not forget that the terrorists of that day did not come from Iraq. And let no one forget that, with only one exception, the entire House of Representatives, Democrats and Republicans alike, all voted to authorize the use of force to destroy the Al Qaeda bases and the Taliban who harbored them in Afghanistan. That is where the terrorists of September 11th were based, that is where the central focus of the fight against terrorists was focused, and we were united, along with virtually the entire world, in that fight.

Iraq is different, and the focus on Iraq has distracted and detracted from the mission in Afghanistan and the real battle against terrorists. Administration suggestions aside, none of the terrorists of September 11th came from, or were trained in Iraq, and there were no weapons of mass destruction.

“President Bush and the rest of the Administration took this nation into an unnecessary and ill conceived war based on false threats and with a deeply flawed plan. Our soldiers, their families, our economy, our overall military readiness, the Iraqi people, friends in the region, and our coalition partners, have all suffered as a result of the Administration’s misinformation and miscalculations.

“Before this war, I, and many others, asked the Administration to answer fundamental questions. How many troops will this take? How many lives will be sacrificed? How long will we be there? What will it cost financially? How will we pay for it? How will you manage internal conflicts among the Iraqis themselves? What will be the impact on our overall security elsewhere in the world?

“The fact is this Administration has never answered any of those fundamental questions honestly or fully. Never. Either they knew the answers and refused to give them, or they did not know and went ahead anyway. If the first is true, they were being dishonest. If the second is true, they were incompetent. Sadly, it appears likely that both incompetence and duplicity were at work.

“Unfortunately, very little has changed since this war began. As we consider the proposed escalation of the occupation in Iraq, none of the most important questions has been answered.

“I voted against this war from the outset and believe to this day that was the right vote. But once we were committed and engaged, I believed, as most of my colleagues and most Americans, that we had a responsibility to support the troops and try our best to help the Iraqis rebuild their nation, establish a democratic republic, and try to restore stability. I, along with most members of this Congress, voted repeatedly to provide our troops the needed resources to succeed, and I fervently hoped the mission would be successful. To a degree, there have been successes. We determined there were no weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein has been removed from power, and is now dead as a result of a public and open judicial process. There have been free and open elections, and Iraq has a constitution and elected government.

“Those are good things. But the costs have been horrific and the key questions still have never been, perhaps cannot be, answered by this Administration. As we consider the President’s latest proposal we must ask again: How many more lives? How much more will this cost? How will we pay for this? What will it do to the rest of our security internationally and at home?

“Because these questions are at the core of whether or not this policy will enhance or jeopardize our troops and our security, and because the Administration to this day is unwilling or incapable of answering these basic questions honestly, I must vote in favor of this resolution, and oppose further troop increases.

“It is irresponsible to allow a commander in chief, who has not been honest or accurate from the outset, to continue sacrificing the lives, bodies and families of our troops to a mission that lacks a clear objective or any foreseeable endpoint.

“It is recklessly dangerous to permit a commander in chief to jeopardize our nation’s security by letting our military equipment, readiness and troop moral continue to decline. It is shortsighted and unwise to leave our National Guard and

Reserve unprepared and under-equipped to respond to other challenges or crises abroad or within our own borders. It is wasteful and foolhardy to build the largest embassy in the world in this very small nation. It is dangerous and strategically unsound to concentrate more of our intelligence assets in this one city, leaving the rest of the world and other dangerous threats less covered. It is unsustainable for our economy to keep pouring out money, forgoing needed investments at home, and piling debt onto our children with no real plan to pay for it, and no real end in sight. It is a breach of trust to not provide the needed services for our veterans and their families when they return home. It is irrational and inaccurate to believe that securing Iraq is the real key to keeping our nation safe from terror, or that if we withdraw from Iraq the only possible outcome is for our nation to be more vulnerable. It is immoral to leave our soldiers dying and bleeding in the middle of a centuries old religious conflict that is not of our creation and is not within our power or responsibility to resolve.

For far too long we have given this President far too much credibility, far too much power, far too many lives and far too much money. It is time to stop.

Having said how I will vote, the sad but simple truth is this, neither moving forward with the President's proposed troop increase, nor voting for this resolution of disapproval, will really do what is needed to secure our own nation, solve the problems in Iraq or bring real stability to the region. There are, in fact, better alternatives to the administration proposal and those of us who oppose the President's plan should spell out what we think is the better course.

This is where I believe that better course should take us

1. We must renew our focus on securing and rebuilding Afghanistan and increase both troop strength and financial investment in that nation along with our allied partners. The fight in Afghanistan was the real and most important fight against the terrorists of September 11th. It was justified from the beginning and remains just today, and it has the support of the world. We cannot let the Taliban regroup and reinstate their reign of terror and extremism there and we still have a chance, though it is slipping fast, to help the Afghanis establish a successful, tolerant and secure nation.

2. In Iraq, the Administration should meet confidentially with the Iraqi leaders and give them a timeline with key benchmarks by which our forces will withdraw. The timeline and benchmarks should be sufficient to ensure the safety of our forces and give the elected Iraqi government a reasonable time to train their forces and strengthen their political processes, but there must be a timeline so there is real pressure for real progress. The process of conveying this information and the timeline itself should be confidential. The elected Iraqi government should then announce that it is they who are asking us to begin withdrawal, thereby strengthening their credibility and leadership while giving our nation a graceful way to exit at their request. Frankly, this should have been done by the administration before the Iraq Study Group report and before this debate in Congress, but it is still not too late.

3. While beginning a measured and strategic redeployment of our forces from Iraq, we should increase our support for infrastructure repair and shift increasing responsibility for that effort to Iraqi companies and workers and away from foreign contractors. We should, however, maintain close oversight of the spending to ensure the resources are being used as intended and we should link continued financial support to real political and security progress on the part of the Iraqis. Further, we should prevail upon wealthy neighbors in the region, notably the Saudi Arabians and others, to expend some of their own vast funds to enhance the infrastructure effort. We should also dramatically reduce the size of the embassy complex that is now under construction in Baghdad and we should pledge to no permanent U.S. bases in Iraq.

4. To help fund the infrastructure and security activities within Iraq, and to give every Iraqi a stake in the success of their political process. An equitable means of distributing oil revenues should be created that ensures all Iraqis will benefit from the oil resources and, simultaneously, that all Iraqis will lose economically if insurgents damage those resources.

¶5. We should encourage the Iraqis to work more closely with moderate Arab neighbors, notably Jordan, Egypt and others in the region to help with the training of the security forces and with the reconstruction effort. This assistance has been offered since the beginning of the conflict but the Iraqis have not taken advantage of that offer to any real degree as of yet.

¶6. Because the Iraq conflict has had a devastating and destabilizing economic, political and social impact on friendly and moderate nations such as Jordan, Egypt and others, we should provide additional financial aid to those nations, particularly to help them deal with the influx of refugees, the high costs of energy, reductions in trade and tourism, and other adverse impacts. We cannot leave our friends to suffer from this conflict, and we dare not let the instability spread to nations that have been models of change and moderation.

¶7. We must also reach out once again to our traditional allies in Europe, Asia and elsewhere in the world, openly acknowledge past mistakes, spell out this new direction, and ask for their financial, diplomatic, and, if necessary, military help in making it succeed.

¶8. While supporting and working with friendly and moderate nations in the region and elsewhere, we should engage in direct discussions and negotiations with other nations in the region, notably Iran and Syria. We disagree profoundly with these nations on many issues, and we must not be naïve or overly optimistic, but it is in our best interests to at least engage in a dialogue and search for areas where we may find common ground. The Administration's refusal to do this, even through back channels, is misguided and counterproductive.

¶9. It is dishonest to not include the full costs of this war and the associated increases in defense spending as part of the annual budget and deficit projections. We must at last fully account for the costs of this war and fully fund our commitment to veterans when they return. To pay for the financial costs, rather than passing debt onto our children, some of the President's tax cuts should be allowed to expire.

¶10. Our focus on the Iraq situation should not cause us to lose sight, as it has for too long, of the real goal, which is promoting broad security, stability and moderation in the region for the sake of that region itself and in the interest of our own security. Even if we could fully secure Iraq with this surge of troops, which is highly doubtful, if we do not improve our overall image and relationships in the region and the world, and if we do not do more to support moderate and friendly nations, we will see continued and worsening threats from extremist groups and rogue nations. A key part of this effort will be playing a constructive role in working to resolve the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. We also have important and necessary work to do to improve our image and relationships within our own hemisphere and

we must not ignore or neglect that work.

¶11. Finally, but importantly, for far too long our energy policy and dependence on petroleum has distorted our foreign policy and thereby endangered our national security, our economy, and our environment. We must recognize that energy policy is coupled with national security and we must change both policies or we will never have real and lasting security.

¶I urge my colleagues to consider this course, but before I conclude, I must respond to those who suggest that if we do not give unquestioning support to this Administration regardless of what they ask for, regardless of history, and regardless of the evidence on the ground, we are somehow empowering the terrorists or undermining our troops. The President himself has implied that any questioning of his policies is politically motivated and anything short of further escalation is sending a message that our nation will cut and run when things get tough.

I believe the evidence suggests the opposite. The evidence from this war is clear, while there may be differences of opinion about policy, this Congress, and the American people have, and will continue to support our troops to the fullest. The evidence is also clear that our troops will serve valiantly and effectively whenever and wherever they are called.

For the elected representatives of the people of this great nation to exercise their constitutional responsibility and demand change is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of the strength of our own republic. Perhaps more importantly, it is a sign of the strength of our very form of government itself, which is, after all, what we are hoping to promote in Iraq and elsewhere in the world. The rest of the world, our allies and adversaries alike, understand this and understand that the strength, character, courage and commitment of this nation, its people, and the Congress are separate from, and stronger than the flaws, and mistakes of any one President or Administration.

We are not turning away from the fight against terrorists or terrorism by changing course in Iraq. We are changing the course of a strategy that has been wrong from the beginning and has not gotten better. Our nation, our armed forces, and our Congress are fully willing to sustain a tough fight when the fight is right and the strategy is sound. But our republic, our people, and this Congress are also strong enough, wise enough and courageous enough, to recognize the truth and change direction when the time comes. That time is now.

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